



## Chief Plenty Coups State Park Indian Education For All Lesson

### Title

The Vision Quest

### Content Area(s)

Social Studies; Media Literacy

### Grade level

4th

### Duration

45 minutes to 1 hour

### Goals (Montana Standards/Essential Understandings)

**ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 1:** There is great diversity among the 12 tribal Nations of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories and governments. Each Nation has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

**ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 3:** The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its own oral history beginning with their origins that are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the “discovery” of North America.

**ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 6:** History is a story and most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. Histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from an Indian perspective conflicts with what most of mainstream history tells us.

**Social Studies Content Standard 4:** Students demonstrate an understanding of the effects of time, continuity, and change on historical and future perspectives and relationships.

**Speaking and Listening Content Standard 4:** Students identify, analyze, and evaluate the impacts of effective speaking and evaluative listening.

**Reading Content Standard 5:** Students gather, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information from a variety of sources, and communicate their findings in ways appropriate for their purposes and audiences.

## Overview

**Chief Plenty Coups State Park Montana: The Magazine of Western History**, Spring 2000 by Holz, Molly

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When Plenty Coups, the last traditional chief of the Crow Indians, recounted his life story to the writer Frank Bird Linderman in 1928, he told of a vision. Conferring with Linderman at his home on the Crow Indian Reservation thirty-five miles south of Billings, Plenty Coups explained how the vision had set the course of his life. Though Plenty Coups was then eighty years old, his memory of it had not dimmed. When he had been about twenty, he said, he had visited a traditional Crow site in the Crazy Mountains and seen himself as an old man. "I saw the spring down by those trees," he told Linderman, "this very house just as it is, these trees which comfort us today, and a very old man sitting in the shade, alone." And so it had come to pass, along with the profound changes the vision implied and with which his people would have to contend.

Plenty Coups was revered in his lifetime for his wisdom and diplomatic skill in helping his people make the transition from traditional lifeways to reservation life as settled agriculturalists. Remembered for those qualities today, he is also commemorated with Chief Plenty Coups State Park, a park that includes the homestead where he sat beneath cottonwood trees and related the story of his vision to Linderman in 1928. That same year, on August 8, Plenty Coups presented his homestead for use as a park. "This park is not a memorial to me," he declared during the dedication ceremony, "but to the Crow nation. It is a token of my friendship for all people, red and white."

## Objectives

1. To learn about the Vision Quest.
2. To understand Plenty Coups reason for his vision quests.

## Suggested Teaching Approaches

- Involve students in the planning of learning experiences about the Crow people and Chief Plenty Coups. These planned experiences may include a visit to Chief Plenty Coups State Park, museum visits, simulation activities, and role playing. Compose questions related to these topics. Make plans for accessing, organizing, and presenting information.
- Use of literature material, biographies of the local people, and oral histories is encouraged.
- Information may be organized and shared in a variety of ways, including: maps, graphs, charts, posters, pictures, dioramas, models, displays, interviews, and stories.
- Develop, with the students, a timeline while discussing what was happening in Europe and the rest of North America during the time Chief Plenty Coups was alive.

## Teacher Preparation

- Teacher should become familiar with the following resources:
  - Linderman, F. (1983). *Plenty Coups, Chief of the Crows*, 1962, University of Nebraska Press (available at many school and public libraries)
  - Vision Quest resources (included in the lesson plan)

## Materials or Resources Needed

- Linderman, F. (1983). *Plenty Coups, Chief of the Crows*, 1962, University of Nebraska Press)
- Vision Quest Resources (included in the lesson plan)

## Suggested Activities and Procedures

### Warm up

Ask students if they know anything about their own personal or family names, first and last. *Why were they named? Who named them? Were they named after other family members, celebrities, places, etc?* Ask the students, *"If you could choose a new name for yourself, what would it be?"* Have them think of special characteristics or talents they each might possess.

Refer to the Internet resource (<http://www.behindthename.com/nmc/eng.php>) to discover the meaning of certain names.

### **KWHL Chart**

Use the instructional technique known as K-W-H- L, to activate students' prior knowledge by asking them what they already **Know**; then students (collaborating as a classroom unit or within small groups) set goals specifying what they **Want** to learn; students then will determine **How** they will find information related to the topic; and after reading students will ***prepare a classroom presentation*** discussing what they have **Learned**. Students apply higher-order thinking strategies which help them construct meaning from what they read and help them monitor their progress toward their goals. A worksheet is given to every student that includes columns for each of these activities. Suggested KWHL emphasis:

**What do I KNOW about Chief Plenty Coups?**

**What do I WANT to know about Chief Plenty Coups?**

**HOW will I find information about Chief Plenty Coups?**

**What have I LEARNED about Chief Plenty Coups and his Vision Quests?**

## Extensions

Check out these Internet resources to learn more about the Vision Quest.

- [http://www.religioperennis.org/documents/yellowtail/Vision\\_Quest.pdf](http://www.religioperennis.org/documents/yellowtail/Vision_Quest.pdf)
- <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~rfrey/plain1.htm>
- <http://www.geocities.com/willow1d/factfox.html>

### **EVALUATION:**

Discussion/observation

Participation

Completed worksheet

Classroom presentation

## Vision Quest Resources

**Looking Back by Julia White** - <http://www.meyna.com/crow.html>

The Vision Quest was of paramount importance in the life of a Crow. Both boys and girls began their Vision Quests around age 9, and it was believed that the villages carried the combined power of all the visions received, and that this power joined forces to be shared by the tribe as a whole. Until visions were received and explained by the village medicine person or shaman, the child had no standing in the village, or in the tribe. The Vision Quest was repeated at intervals set by the elders and medicine people until visions were received, but to lie about success was unthinkable and an unforgivable sin. However, if there were repeated failures in the Vision Quests, the individual was ostracized. Such repeated failure was cause for dishonor and for scorn as such individuals were not allowed to marry and take their rightful place in the village, or in the tribe. In order to preserve self-worth and dignity, a person could buy a part of the vision of a tribal leader, elder or medicine person until such time as he received his own messages.

## Vision Quest

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Medicine man and Sun Dance chief Thomas Yellowtail is a pivotal figure in Crow tribal life. In this chapter from *Yellowtail, Crow Medicine Man and Sun Dance Chief, An autobiography as told to Michael Oren Fitzgerald* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1991), Yellowtail exposes the path of spiritual realization according to the Plain Indians.

One of the main rites of the Sun Dance religion is the vision quest. It is a period set for solitary prayer at a remote place. A person will usually spend three or four days of fasting on the vision quest, saying his prayers during all that time. He goes away up in the hills, gets away from people, and goes off by himself, and there fast and prays for either the three- or four-day period he selected before he began his quest.

There are many intentions that a person may have when he prepares to make a vision quest. He may want medicine, some kind of power to help him in battle or in all of his life. Strong medicine powers would protect the man so that he would not be wounded and could not be hit by an enemy's arrow. That kind of medicine would make a man successful in battle with the enemy. A lot of men seek those kinds of powers, and that is what they have in mind when they start out on the vision quest[1].

Some men might seek different kind of medicine power or understanding. They may to be able to heal or doctor people. They may seek the answer to a question or a problem that is bothering them or the family or tribe. And above all, a man may want to pray in this way because this is a way to come closer to Acbadadea. In this rite each man may awaken in his heart the knowledge of the Maker of All Things Above. A man may pray for any of those things because they would be helpful to him, his family, and his tribe, but a man also must pray for virtue and the correct understanding with which to face life.

In olden days, all young men had those kinds of feelings, and that was only why they would go on the vision quests. Sometimes a few of them would go out together. Maybe four or five of them would take a sweat bath together and start out together. When they go out to the hills, each one would go on his solitary way. Each one had to face the medicine powers alone. One would take that pointed hill over there; another one would take the next hill. They would scatter, each by himself, putting in his days. Some would stay four days, some less. Some of them might have received something by the time they came back; some may have come back without anything. Some of them would have been successful and might have had a vision, have been visited by an animal, or have had a dream or something to bring back, and that is good – that meant something. Another would come back and say that he did not receive anything. It means that he would have to try again later, and usually he would. He would try again later on and try again and again.

Many of them ended their days by saying, “I tried not once, but a number of times, and finally I was visited by a bird or animal that gave me medicine, and I finally have some medicine, some kind of power or understanding.” And that was the way in those days. They would have kept trying until they got something. Some of the most sincere ones would probably receive something the first time they went on a vision quest. It depended on the sincerity of the person.

If they have a good, strong intention, then they may have been the ones who were successful in their dream or vision right away. They would have been told afterwards what to do to preserve the medicine power given by the bird or the animal, and they would have done what they were told. Perhaps they might have been told to make a medicine bundle or carry part of the animal with them when they went on their raiding party against the enemy or when they needed to make the medicine.

Before a man would go on a vision quest, he would first consult with a medicine man. It was the duty of the people who asked for instruction to bring a pipe or a smoke to the instructor. If the medicine man accepted the responsibility to instruct the younger man, then they would first offer the smoke with a prayer. Then the medicine man would tell the young man what to do to prepare – how to go through purification before going up and all the other necessary information. He would explain to the young man how to seek war medicine. Some would have had a different purpose. The instructions for the prayer depended on the young man’s intention.

In those days when people wanted to go fasting, they first prepared themselves by taking a sweat bath to purify themselves. This is still my practice because it is very important to undergo a purification before and after every major undertaking. Right after he was through with the sweat bath, the vision seeker would get up to where he wanted to spend three or four days upon the hill and high mountains. According to his own choosing, he would select a place where he wanted to fast.

Many would sacrifice a finger when they got up there. They would chop off the top of their finger and offer it to the Great Spirit or to an animal. If a bird came and took that piece of finger, then the bird would probably come back after a while and adopt that person, give him medicine, and tell him to go home. This could happen in one or two days’ time, although the person’s intention may have been to spend four days. If he was visited by an animal of some kind who felt sorry for him sitting there torturing himself, then the medicine power would say, “I have come to see you; you are torturing yourself; you had better stop that and go back home, and I will give you some kind of power and tell you what to do.” After the man would get home, that bird or animal – it might be a hawk, or a crow, or a meadowlark, or any kind of bird or animal – would come to visit that person and tell him what to do. The person would end the fast right then and there and go home; he would have received something already. People on the Crow reservation today still use the vision quest.